

THE HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the historic district study committee report is to establish the legal basis for the creation of a local historic district. Historical data about a proposed district that has been collected, analyzed, and summarized is presented in the report in a clear and concise manner to illustrate the historic significance of a district. The report should justify why a local historic district is being established and why the proposed boundaries for the district were chosen. When writing the report, remember that it serves as a source of information for a variety of audiences including:

- the historic district commission as it fulfills its duties as the regulatory body for the district
- planners when decisions on development projects are made within the community
- professional consultants hired to do historic reviews for federally funded projects
- the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) when reviewing state preservation tax credit applications
- teachers and others in the community interested in using the information to create educational programs about a community's heritage

Most importantly, the report is a legal document. It should make a solid case for the district's significance, follow the criteria and guidelines as required, and be as professional as possible in appearance.

Required Components of the Report

Section 399.203 of Public Act 169 of 1970, as amended, (PA 169) *Michigan's Local Historic Districts Act*, requires that a historic district study committee report contain, at a minimum, the following items:

- charge of the committee
- composition of the committee membership
- name of the proposed historic district(s)
- written and visual boundaries of the district
- history of the proposed district
- the significance of the district highlighted by information on a sufficient number of the individual resources to fully represent the variety of resources within the district

In addition to the minimum requirements listed above, the Michigan Historical Center established criteria in August 2002 that require the inclusion of the following information in the historic district study committee report:

- a boundary justification
- total count of the number of resources in the proposed district and the percentage of historic (contributing) to non-historic (non-contributing) resources.
- a list of historic (contributing) and a list of non-historic (non-contributing) resources in the district
- current photographs of the resources that are highlighted in the report, including streetscapes that show how individual resources relate to each other

A sample cover sheet has been included at the end of this chapter to help you to incorporate the necessary information needed to fulfill the requirements set forth in PA 169. Below is an explanation of the type of information that should be included in each component of the report.

Historic District Study Committee Report Components

1. Charge of the Committee

The local unit of government, through a resolution, must appoint the members of the historic district study committee. In the study committee report, the charge should contain the following information:

- Name of the municipal body that appointed the historic district study committee
- Date the resolution to appoint the historic district study committee was adopted
- A short verbal description roughly describing the boundaries of the geographic area the committee was directed to study

2. Composition of Committee Membership

The name of each study committee member should be listed in the report. Because PA 169 requires that the majority of study committee members have a “demonstrated interest” in historic preservation, it is a good idea to show how committee members fulfill this requirement by listing their historic preservation interests and affiliations. This need not be a lengthy description.

EXAMPLE:

John Douglas, member, Elk County Historical Society
Lee Ann Pratt, architect, Smith and Wells, Inc.
Tom Baker, property owner, proposed Lincoln Heights Historic District
Sue Richards, planner, Lincoln City
Eileen Jones, compiled a comprehensive history of Lincoln City for the city’s centennial celebration
Brian Harris, teacher, Lincoln City Elementary School, developed local history program for 4th graders
Todd Baron, archaeologist, Westphalia College, Westphalia, OH

3. Name of the Historic District Studied

This is simply the name given to the proposed district that results from the study. **Example:** “Lincoln Heights Historic District” or the “Adolph Stephens Farmstead Historic District.” District names are typically based on the historic name associated with the property or area. Be sure the name is descriptive of the specific area being designated is not too generic should the city wish to designate other local historic districts in the future. The district name should appear prominently on the cover and at the beginning of the report.

4. Boundaries of the Proposed District

PA 169 requires that the historic district study committee report include both a written boundary description and a visual depiction of the boundary on a map. The purpose of the map(s) is to enable readers of the report to determine which individual properties in a given area are or are not included in the district. Thus, the maps should be of a level of detail and quality where this can clearly be seen.

a. Verbal Boundary Description

The verbal boundary description must be a legal description of the district boundary. The description should be written so that a property owner or federal, state, or

city planning agencies can clearly identify the district's boundaries and the resources it contains. Depending on the size of the district the verbal boundary description of the district could be:

- Block and lot number
- Metes and bounds, or
- Dimensions of a parcel of land, reckoning from a landmark, such as a natural or cultural feature. The description should begin at a fixed reference point and then follow the perimeter of the district, including dimensions and directions.
- Legal parcel number. While parcel numbers make it easy to identify properties and are what most communities use, they should **NOT** be the sole source of identification for the district boundaries. Parcels can be merged or eliminated which may cause confusion when trying to identify the boundaries of a district in the future. When parcel numbers are used, a metes and bounds description of the district's boundaries should also be included.

b. Visual Boundary Description

The visual boundaries of the proposed district should be clearly and boldly drawn on a map so they are easily distinguishable in the original report and on any copies that are made. The final map(s) should be of a size and format that will allow them to be bound within the body of the report: 8 ½ by 11 inches for most districts or 11 x 17 inches with 2 vertical folds for larger districts. Each map should include all of the following:

- Name of the proposed district
- Name of the community and county
- Date the map was created
- Key identifying any symbols used on the map
- North arrow
- All streets in the proposed district with their names clearly labeled
- Street addresses for all properties in the proposed district
- Lot lines
- Building footprints or a representational outline (rectangles or squares) of the individual resources surveyed in the proposed district
- The boundary of the proposed district clearly drawn in a bold line on the map

For small districts one map may suffice. For larger districts, a series of maps may be required. These should include one overview map that shows the location of the proposed district within the community and a series of other maps that show smaller areas of the district in more detail. For example, if you are designating a large district that includes 200 residential properties and a park, you would include an overview map of the whole district that shows the district's boundaries within the larger community; maps (keyed to the larger map) that each show a portion of the district that enables the reader to see street numbers and addresses, until the entire district has been depicted; and a site map of the park indicating the location of existing historic features, such as paths, fountains, historic plantings, and monuments. For complex single resource districts such as an estate or a farmstead, in addition to marking the boundary of the district on a plat map, it will be necessary to draw and include a site plan to indicate where historically significant features such as orchards, farm fields, silos, barns, gardens, garages and outbuildings are located in relation to the main building.

c. Boundary Justification

The report should include a boundary justification that addresses each directional boundary of the proposed district. Boundaries should be justified using three guidelines:

geographical features, the historic significance of the district, and/or the integrity of the resources in the proposed district. **Example:** The northern district boundary is the Redwood River; the eastern boundary is I-59 which, when it was constructed in 1957, bisected the original plat for the Cherry Heights neighborhood; Elm Street was chosen as the southern boundary because it marks a change in housing types from a concentration of Victorian era homes to the north and a neighborhood of post-World War II brick ranch houses to the south; Green Street was chosen as the western boundary as there is a significant loss of material integrity in the resources located west of Green Street.

For a single resource district a simple statement may be sufficient. **Example:** The boundaries are those of the original lot platted in 1887.

5. History of the Proposed District

The purpose of the history is to place the district and its resource(s) within its historic context at the local, state, or national level, as need be. The historic context incorporates the significant time periods, the significant people, and the important trends that shaped the development of the proposed district. The history should be based on facts that can be documented through primary and secondary sources. Do not include oral traditions that have been passed down for generations but cannot be substantiated through written documentation. The history is one of the most important pieces of the historic district study committee report as it serves as the legal foundation for the establishment of the district by showing how the district is historically significant.

The history included in the study committee report must be able to stand on its own. It is the responsibility of the study committee to analyze the data it collects during the survey and condense it into a concise and useful format. Simply copying newspaper articles or brochures and submitting them as the report is not acceptable. Submitting only the survey data forms from the resource survey as the study committee report is also not sufficient. The survey forms are support documentation—they provide no analysis or general overview of the history of the district. If a National Register nomination has already been completed for the district, it can serve as the basis of the report but the report must still address the six minimum requirements set forth in Section 3 of Public Act 169. In addition, National Register nominations written prior to 1990 are sometimes vague and lacking in detail and may need to be supplemented with other information to meet current standards.

When writing the report, existing resources in the district should be linked directly to the district's historic significance by including the street address of a specific resource when appropriate in the history statement. Be sure to focus on the resources that exist in the district today. Do not spend a lot of time in the report on resources that have been demolished or that no longer exist. While these will be discussed in terms of the development of the district, the purpose of the report is to show how extant buildings represent the history of the district. **Example:**

In the early 1900's Middletown became the center of the developing automobile industry in Michigan. Travis Jones, whose "Tourister" became the largest selling car in America between 1910 and 1930, built a factory at 915 Washington Street in 1910 (demolished 1977). Construction of the factory resulted in a boom in population for Middletown as workers left the surrounding farms to take advantage of the high wages offered in the Jones factory. To house these workers, Dorian Blue, a prominent real estate agent in the city, platted the Oakdale neighborhood adjacent to the factory site. Oakdale is made up of six blocks of single story, gable front frame houses, all in the Arts and Crafts style. The homes have little ornamentation but are distinguished by their pressed tin roofs, shingle siding, wide stone porches and exposed rafter ends. This was the first subdivision developed in Middletown in response to the needs of the rapidly expanding automobile industry. Each house was built with a detached garage at the rear of the property, an unusual feature in an early twentieth century neighborhood. The Jones factory provided a

credit plan to its workers enabling them to purchase an automobile over time thus ensuring that every Jones worker drove a “Tourister” automobile manufactured by the company. Construction of homes in the Oakdale neighborhood virtually stopped in 1930 with the onset of the Great Depression and the subsequent closing of the factory.

In addition to the Jones factory, one other car manufacturer built a plant in Middletown. The Casey Steam-Powered Automobile Company built in 1904 was only in production for two years (1904-1906) and thus did not have much impact on the development of the automobile or the city of Middletown. However, its founder, James Casey, became President of Jones Automobile in 1912 and was responsible for the design of the company’s most popular car, the “Tourister” which led to Middletown’s boom. Casey was also a founding member of the Good Roads Movement in Michigan and was directly responsible for the construction of the first paved highway between Middletown and Detroit. James Casey’s large limestone, Prairie-style home, with its canopy of old oak trees and landscaped rose garden, is located at 12 Addison Street on the western edge of the Oakdale district. Casey Park, located in the northeast section of the district was created on land donated to the city of Middletown by James Casey in 1923. Casey hired the nationally known landscape architect, Jens Jensen, to develop the naturalistic plan for the park.

If properties in the district are significant because of a specific architectural style, they should be discussed in terms of similar resources in the proposed district or in the community overall. You do not need to write lengthy descriptions of the various architectural styles found in the district—there are plenty of architectural stylebooks that already do that. Instead, identify the style and summarize the distinguishing characteristics of the style that are found on a specific property or that are common in the district. **Example:**

The Ira George House at 15 Lincoln Avenue is an excellent example of the Italianate style. The 2-story structure has a square floor plan and is distinguished by its decorative full-length front porch, cupola, round arch windows, and large, ornamental roof brackets. This high style building is one of only 6 Italianate style homes found in the district and the only one constructed of brick.

Do not fall into the trap, as many communities do, of only explaining the significance of the proposed district in terms of its architecture. It is very important to include information on the significant people (both men and women) and events that shaped the district as well.

PA 169 states that the report must highlight individual resources within the proposed district. A current photograph and a history statement should be included for each of the individual resources highlighted in the report. A representative example of *all* the property types found in the district should be included in the report. **Example:** if a predominately residential district includes three schools, two churches, a park and six commercial structures, then at least one of each of these types of resources should be highlighted in the report along with a variety of the residential homes. When discussing residences, be sure that the report includes a sample of the representative examples of the housing styles most commonly found in the proposed district—don’t just concentrate on the unique, special, or high style properties. **Example:** if the majority of the homes in the district are bungalows or simple upright and wing homes, include one or more as representative examples of these resources in addition to highlighting the high style or architect designed homes found in the district. The reader should get a good sense of the district’s resource composition from the report.

6. Statement of Significance

Each resource needs to be evaluated using the evaluation criteria for the National Register of Historic Places. There are four primary criteria:

- Criterion A: Association with Significant Events
- Criterion B: Association with Significant People
- Criterion C: Design/Construction Significance
- Criterion D: Information Potential

A full explanation of the criteria can be found in *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria*.

In the report, the significance statement should clearly state which of the criteria that the district meets—there may be more than one—and how it meets the criteria. **Example:** The Oakdale District is significant under National Register Criterion A for its association with the developing automobile industry in Michigan; Criterion B for its association with early automobile pioneers Travis Jones and James Casey, also a Good Roads advocate, who lived in the district from 1911 to 1936; and Criterion C for its representative examples of early twentieth century architecture.

7. Photographs

The photographs included in the report should be taken from the photographic survey conducted by the study committee. Digital photographs may be used. Photographs should follow the standards set forth in the *Manual for Historic and Architectural Surveys in Michigan* available free from the State Historic Preservation Office. The report should include a current photograph for each of the resources the study committee chooses to highlight in the report. Historic photographs can be included when available, but not to the exclusion of current photographs. Representative streetscape photographs should also be included in the report to show how individual properties and features in the district relate to each other. For a single resource district, streetscape photographs that show the property in relation to surrounding resources are required. The photographs MUST be clear and readable in the original and in copies. The report filed with the SHPO will be used by consultants and others and they must be able to see the resource and its significant details.

8. Resource Counts and Percentage

Historic resources are typically those that are fifty years of age or older, unless the resource is proven to have exceptional significance. Historic resources should retain their integrity—the physical features that represent the period in which the property was built and/or its period of historic significance. Integrity is determined by looking at seven qualities: location (is the property on its original location), design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association (with people and events).

Each resource in the proposed district should be evaluated to determine if it is a historic (contributing) or non-historic (non-contributing) resource. To make that determination, evaluate the resource in terms of how it relates to the historic context that was developed for the proposed district, the National Register Criteria for Eligibility, and the resource's integrity.

The total number of resources in the district as well as the breakdown of the total number of historic and the total number of non-historic resources must also be included in the report. Public Act 169 requires that the percentage of historic to non-historic properties be developed. This percentage must be included in the report. In addition to the primary buildings, outbuildings, structures, and landscape features that are substantial in size and scale should be included in the historic resource count. Examples might include garages, carriage barns, fences, entry posts, drives, windmills, gardens, etc. Any feature that adds significantly to the setting of the resource, and therefore should be reviewed by the historic district commission, should be included in the count.

9. Lists of Historic and Non-Historic Resources

A list of the historic (contributing) properties by street name and address and a list of the non-historic (non-contributing) properties by street name and address in the district must be included in the report. It is one of the most functional features of the report and will greatly facilitate its use by the historic district commission, building officials, and local planners. It will also enable residents and city officials to see at a glance if a particular property qualifies for state historic preservation tax incentives.

10. Bibliography

Each report should include a bibliography of the resources used to develop the history of the district. The bibliography should be presented in any standard, accepted format such as the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

The Final Report

Michigan's *Local Historic Districts Act* only requires that the historic district study committee submit a preliminary report to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for review and comment. However since the state preservation tax credit was established in 1999, it has become increasingly important for the SHPO to receive a copy of the final report. Once the local unit of government votes to establish a district, a copy of the final report and the historic district ordinance should be sent to the SHPO. This ensures that the district will be added to the state's historic resource database and that the SHPO has the most updated information on file.

LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT COVER FORM

Historic District Name:

City/Village:

Township:

County:

Date Transmitted:

Report Type: ☐ Preliminary ☐ Final

Total Number of Resources: Historic: Non-Historic: Percentage:

District is Significant under the Following National Register Criteria:

☐ Criterion A: Significant Event(s) - Reason:

☐ Criterion B: Significant Person(s) - Reason:

☐ Criterion C: Design/Construction- Reason:

☐ Criterion D: Information Potential - Reason:

☐ Criterion Consideration(s) – Reason:

Legal Boundary Description:

Charge of the Committee:

Committee Members:

Contact Name (City Official):

Address:

Phone:

E-Mail: